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**You But For The Body
Fell Against**

by
Nathalie Stephens



belladonna* books

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deadly nightshade, a cardiac and respiratory stimulant, having purplish-red flowers and black berries

YOU BUT FOR THE BODY FELL AGAINST

**by
Nathalie Stephens**

You count the years leading away from me.

In adornment and philosophy. In rivers' edges and wrought
bridges, rusted scaffolding.

Accuse me your city.

After the wide-angled sea. The tall pines felled. The stones
where some sit. The waters seditiously.

Say: You but for the body fell against.

It is the same day.

It is the same day.

It is the mouth torn open on some seam.

I wandered inland. With the dogs uncomplaining. I turned my back to
the sea and beckoned the land overtake me.

It was like this: a bookstand and a microphone. The day's sharp
incision. The body draining. Un livre.

It was the man's need to speak. The impatient necks craning.
The again and again of speech.

I listened for the many doors closing. The heart's sudden seizure. The compression of centuries into one solid moment of bereavement. The thing that I touched did not weep. The body did not fall in the street. And the man went on speaking.

No one said: Nathanaël fold into me.

Nor: What we destroyed of history we redeemed with inscription. The hand holds what is wounded in offering to some dream.

I turned the page and tore it.

The beasts shook their heads and showed their teeth.

Twice winter came.

The shadows shortened and then shortened again. Our bodies grew thin and our mouths kissed what was unnameable. We touched with our hands every place we had been.

The sky became stone and the city fell to ruin. The people drowned in their tears and the earth stank of urine.

The voice that rose in song broke what was left of speaking. What promises had been made became dust. What consolation unbelieving. The mouth stuttered and the ground with it.

We could not say What was. Nor Might have been.

It was every day ending and no way of telling.

The books later said we were forlorn. But it was different than that. We had seen our way to the heart's hard bone and broken it.

Touch what is left of leaving.

Lift the torn edge of sleep and swallow what is missing. The river spills we weaken. The bedsheet tears we are naked. The lines of glass score our soft palms there is little left of meaning. Not the cold ground. Nor this shameless idolatry. We speak. We are spoken. The call hollows the heart stalls the wild summons.

Come for me.

I went to Hell.

It was the same city all over again. It was the same scurveyed sun and the people milling. There was talk of sacrilege and a voice demanding. The street map buckled. It was all in good fun.

I walked to where the road caved. The little girl pulled her pants down. A goat died and we drank its blood. The buildings were jewelled and the signs read Slaughter.

I for one went missing.

We both died. We hadn't foresight enough to run.

The letters go unanswered.

I take nothing of what is offered. Call it massacre.

This is the city demeaned. This is the city of set jaws and gritted teeth. It is the inscription of senility in bulges of fat and the remnant of broken schemes. It culls the weary from the defeated. It promises keep. It proffers greed. It lifts the head toward expectancy. It grinds hard the knees.

I translate its deficiency. I call the mother's name out from under. I grope toward the sister she becomes illusory. I wear the mark of the city's architecture. I take the lover into the mouth. What becomes of me is scrawl is illegible is hollow is gloat is secede.

I open what is closed. I scream and I scream.

The madness scores the skin. We balk at it before taking it in. We remove what covers. We are loathe to begin.

We solicit leaving. Shun the evening. The turn of the orange sun. The encroachment of what darkens. We fall fast. We bargain with our pain. We deny the thing that moves through dusk into the body. The ink-swell of rage bottomed into a flat plane of sufferance. Even our vocabulary is wrought of disdain. And the voices rise against us. And the hands admonish the thing we refuse to touch. And the body ignites the sorrow drowned in us. And the mouth starves the motioning of language. And the skin scars the having lost. Accuse the song named after us.

We are the unburied. And distrust.

I fancied myself the vestiges.

I worried the blemished turn of page with my rubbed fingers. I wandered the secular age with fury. I was indecent and carried stone like Moses. I was indignant. My bounded rage suited me. I pounded the hearts of many and disowned what I suffused with glory. I danced voluminously and made wet the sea.

It was a copious rendering. It was up and then under. The city-rock trembling. The sententious. The free.

Is this as we are? Is this as we imagine ourselves to be?

No one said: Who were you Nathanaël? Who stroked the body of the man. Who touched the earth and vanished. That same sad and wondrous. That same deleterious.

The book became of me. What we meant was overseen.

It could have been anywhere.

It was the book of the boy many times misplaced. Not what we thought. Nor what fell so quickly out of favour.

I will tell you : just this once. The books that needed reading. The night heat. And a white light through a curtained window. Soft wood and a back coiled collecting. June, for example. And a green shelf lined from full to empty.

I walked all those days with my head against the ground. I walked a fine pencil line scattering the mysteries of my forked palms and my cut-out tongue. It was the voices of the many countries tangled into one. It was the spat-up city-block. It was the skinny buildings leaned up against the rotted sun. It was the meagre rations for the many-times won. It was the thing that consumed. The thing that was consummately undone. Tied like that into innards from the simplest of knots.

I could name them. The streets for beginning. The streets for grief and the streets for other times. From this window and the small collection of locusts wrapped in wire at my feet.

Don't you see? The daughters unwound from the book? The mother hung downward from trees?

All the grasses grow out of a fear. So we tread there and only there.

The footsteps retrace before being begun. The back turns, the buildings burn into an abstract sum. The crossed line is impermeable. I think it. Visible and invisible, a particular pull of sound, a magnificent aberration, a succession of any one thing, over and over.

I don't settle but fall. Contrive to fall. Against rock or oblivion. This is no way to ask a question. No way to unmake a wall. This is an architecture of bricked windows and strained pine. Of furrow and forestall. Tar paper gutters and limestone thresholds. Copper leaf lovers set in glass that doesn't shatter.

I said swamp. I didn't say mountain. It was a slip of the tongue. I turned right at the lake instead of continuing straight on.

I strip myself of this name. I turn from the shallow edge of water to the only place. From the sandblasted city-monument. From the uprisen cinder block. From the rat-trodden alleways. To the vacant lot. To the stuck page. To the upended quarry. To the disheveled waterway. To the wasted days.

Invents the particular distance for sky. It is in the heaviness. The absent horizon. A steep climb of rock making the pulled apart mark for insisting, having insisted. The need for an other thing. A dry kiss in morning. What is left of the slept self clung to in fists that knot one indistinction to another. These are the designs of many unlovable gods, a knack for disappearance. A belief that can only be proletarian.

This might be the seizure of a desperation. The distance between lectern and slave. (Salve!)

It wasn't in answer to any one question. Rather the impervious feed of seduction. We are the most earnest of arrivistes. Seeking bedrock. Flooding, instead, in heat. Our beds spread and every kind of love drains into the manicured field.

Tell me anyway : your own harrowed retreat.

Binds me :

No one said : Nathanaël you are what remains. Of the burst dream and the lake that drowned it.

Nor : A trace made in the place of this that is unmakeable.

We speak to be spoken. Or not at all.

There is in the moment before the afterthought already forming. The footworn step, up and up, disappearing. A way toward reinvention. A stupidity no doubt. From Tibidabo to the sea a naked man lies then rises then lies again. There is nonetheless the fact of all that concrete between and a blue notebook abandoned in the sheets.

The many attempts at circumference. In the paper scrawl. In the unfolded map. In the trial then retreat. To speak of February in August replete. A plant that doesn't grow from seed. A stem that is rotted in flesh. The illogic of growth under a sky that heaves.

On an edge of water there is the thing and it is just out of reach. The man lies and so should we. For the impression made at the moment of leaving. For the city-squares folded into the beach. For the rest of us who know nothing of the sea's voracity.

No one goes there. And why should we?

It is the same wrecked reason. It is the same imperfect measure.
It is the same bored location. From window to ground. From body to
wonder. From wall to whereabouts.

If it were possible we would stop. Wouldn't we?

It is this moment freed of itself.

I take the walking book from the shelf and set it on the ground.
I squander that immediacy. This is as I dispense this particular
remembrance. Who's to say? It collects in the hipbone on drenched
days. It locks the soft parts into starvation. The throat lurches into the
mouth and seizes up. So I swallow it into me.

I drink water from a rusted cup.

I rain with the sky.

I rain dust.

NS
Toronto/Chicago
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25. Carla Harryman, *DIMBLUE* and *Why Yell*
26. Anne Waldman, *[THINGS] SEEN/UNSEEN*
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28. Bhanu Kapil Rider, from *The Wolf Girls* oop
of Midnapure oop
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destroying my bathroom...
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TRUTH
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80. Stacy Szymaszek, *hyper glossia*
81. Nathalie Stephens, *You But For The*
Body Fell Against
82. Rachel Zolf, from *Human Resources*

Nathalie Stephens: Publications

Books

L'Injure, Montréal, l'Hexagone, 2004. Finalist, Prix Trillium and Prix Alain-Grandbois, 2005.
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What Exile This, Ottawa, above/ground press, "Stanzas 29", 2002.
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All Boy, Calgary, housepress, 2001; Toronto, BookThug, 2004.

Translations

Deuils cannibales et mélancoliques (as A Cannibal and Melancholy Mourning),
novel, by Catherine Mavrikakis, Toronto, Coach House Books, 2004.

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